

times. It is also a reminder that Senate offices should continue to follow the mail policies that are in place for their safety in this investigation.

Fortunately, the system in place to protect the Senate community worked. Maybe people say: Well, it is not good enough. It is good. I remember what happened when we had anthrax with Senator Daschle and Senator LEAHY in previous years. So the system that is in place to protect the Senate community has worked. That is good. These suspicious letters were found and intercepted before they reached the Capitol.

I applaud the postal employees and law enforcement officials who detected and neutralized this threat. I commend the Senate Sergeant at Arms, Chief Gainer, and the Capitol Police for their diligent work to keep the Senate community safe. I rest easier knowing the safety of everyone who works and visits the Capitol is their first priority. I know that to be the case.

I apologize to my friend the Republican leader for talking longer than I usually do.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

TEXAS TRAGEDY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to say a brief word about last night's tragedy near Waco. From the media reports we have seen, there have clearly been a great many injuries and a terrible loss of life. We are all thinking of and praying for the victims and their families.

Given the horrendous event at the Boston Marathon on Monday, followed by the event near Waco last night, it has been a very difficult week for all of us. Our hearts are a little bit heavier. I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

SAFE COMMUNITIES, SAFE SCHOOLS ACT OF 2013

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 649, which the clerk will report by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 649) to ensure that all individuals who should be prohibited from buying firearms are listed in the national criminal background check system and require a background check for every firearm sale, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Barrasso amendment No. 717, to withhold 5 percent of Community Oriented Policing

Services program Federal funding from States and local governments that release sensitive and confidential information on law-abiding gun owners and victims of domestic violence.

Harkin amendment No. 730, to reauthorize and improve programs related to mental health and substance use disorders.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRAYERS FOR WEST, TEXAS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it is perhaps an understatement to say that it has been a difficult week for our country.

As Americans hold the city of Boston in their thoughts and prayers, I come to the floor to ask for another prayer for the small town of West, TX, in McLennan County, which is very close to Waco, TX.

I just got off the phone talking to the county judge, Scott Felton, and he described for me the terrible tragedy that occurred last night and the ongoing efforts to recover from that tragedy.

Apparently a fire started at an ammonia facility that then caught some tanks of anhydrous ammonia on fire and they literally exploded. And for those who aren't aware of the use of anhydrous ammonia, it is actually a source of nitrogen used in the cultivation of crops. You can imagine that at this time of year, springtime, when planting is starting, there is a lot of use for this essential fertilizer.

The fire started at about 7:30 last night, and the volunteer fire department/first responders were called. The problem was they showed up for a fire but ultimately ended up being victims of the explosions that ensued a short time thereafter when tanks of this anhydrous ammonia exploded. They don't yet know the number of fatalities.

I saw in press reports it could be between 5 and 15. Judge Felton tells me he fears it could be on the higher side of that number or even higher; they just don't know. They are continuing to try to find the victims and help those who need help.

We do know more than 100 people were wounded. An unknown number have lost their lives, as I said, but we do know that among the dead are a number of firefighters, volunteer firefighters, and other first responders. As typical, and as we actually saw in Boston, during a time of crisis in tight-knit communities such as West and cities such as Boston, we see some acts of

real heroism that are encouraging at a time when we could use a little encouragement. We are seeing the resilience of a tight-knit, self-sufficient community in the aftermath of this terrible tragedy.

Businesses have reportedly stayed open throughout the night and neighbors have opened their doors to help support the victims. As is so often the case, ordinary citizens ran toward danger as they offered assistance. One resident loaded his car with people and made three successive trips to the hospital. This morning, as I was waking up and watching the news, I saw one gentleman who said he made multiple trips into the nursing home for nursing home residents who were not able to walk out themselves, to bring them to safety.

As one police officer at the scene said, "The people of West will not let a person stand out in the rain."

We, of course, grieve for those who lost their lives and we pray for those who are injured and still missing. I ask all Americans to keep the people of West, TX, in their thoughts and prayers.

GUN LEGISLATION

Mr. President, on another note—and I say this more in sadness than in anger—I watched the President of the United States say it was a pretty shameful day for Washington—on the national news. That was yesterday. I agree, but for different reasons than the President himself articulated. When good and honest people have honest differences of opinion about what policies our country should pursue when it comes to the Second Amendment and gun rights and mass gun violence, the President of the United States should not accuse them of having no coherent arguments or caving to the pressure. The President could have taken the high road, could have said, ok, now that we have been unsuccessful in these measures, let's move on to the area where we know there is consensus and that has to do with the mental health element in so many of these mass gun tragedies.

Instead, he chose to take the low road. I agree with him it was a truly shameful day. I and many of my colleagues are not worried, as some of the press like to portray it, about the gun lobby who would spend a lot of money and paint us as anti-Second Amendment. I don't work for them. I don't listen for them. I work for 26 million Texans, and I am proud to represent them. The views I represented on the floor of the Senate are their views. If I do not represent their views, then I am accountable to them and no one else, and, no, those of us who did not agree with the President's proposals are not being intimidated, as he said yesterday. It is false, it is absolutely false to say it comes down to politics, as he said.

For me, it comes down to a meeting I had with the families who lost loved ones at Sandy Hook Elementary